Three Philosophical Reflections

These three articles, first published in newspapers, offer philosophical reflections on three different subjects.

1. Reflections on Near-Death and Mystical Experiences

This position examines near-death and mystical experiences from a transcendental perspective. It explores the possibility of the soul and non-material dimensions of existence, while emphasizing that such experiences do not confer absolute knowledge or supernatural authority.

2. A Critical Assessment of Transcendental Claims about Mystics

This position questions exaggerated claims regarding the supernatural knowledge and powers attributed to mystics. It argues that all human knowledge and action remain subject to the laws and order of nature, and that mystical experience primarily results in inner peace rather than extraordinary power or universal knowledge.

3. A Humanistic Critique of Boundaries and Violence

This position analyzes how constructed boundaries—religious, ethnic, linguistic, and ideological—are used to justify violence. It emphasizes shared humanity as the only stable foundation for peace and ethical coexistence.

1

Reflections on Near-Death and Mystical Experiences

Habib ollah Noorani,
Philosophy Graduate

1. Near-Death Experiences (NDEs) and Mystical Experiences can be interpreted in two main ways. The first explanation is more scientific and naturalistic, viewing them as purely subjective phenomena reducible to brain functions. The second explanation is transcendental, positing the existence of a soul within the human body.

2. This writing focuses solely on the second explanation and its logical implications. This is not to say the first explanation is weak or cannot account for such experiences. Rather, both interpretations and their rational consequences deserve careful examination.
3. If we accept the second premise, the soul must have another realm or dimension where these experiences occur. This implies that existence extends beyond the material world, which is only a small part of reality. After separating from the body, the soul would continue to live in another dimension.
4. Since there is inviolable order in the material world, the soul and its realm must also have their own specific laws and principles.
5. The common point between NDEs and mystical experiences is detachment from the body. In NDEs, the body is damaged, and the soul temporarily leaves it. In mystical experiences, the soul, strengthened and empowered, can temporarily leave the body and behold the spiritual world. Thus, the body acts as both a veil and a hindrance to the soul's vision; when the body is left behind, the soul becomes freer and more potent.
6. In the realm of mystical experience, the empowerment and flourishing of the soul occurs through practices like prayer or meditation, granting it the ability to leave the body.
7. Many who have had NDEs report entering a state of extremely intense pleasure or pain. In this state, as the body and its needs are absent, the individual exists as a pure observer. Awareness and emotions become exceptionally clear and pure.
8. When the soul separates from the body and the person realizes they are not annihilated without it, this brings joy. Another profoundly calming realization is that nothing else can harm or distress them, leading them into a unique and profound peace.
9. As observers in both types of experiences have noted, for the soul, there is no specific place or time, as these are features of our material world. If we accept the soul, it can go anywhere and any-when—though even this is a metaphor.
10. Because the soul is subtle, it can expand and witness all the effects of its own actions. Consequently, it can experience absolute bliss or infinite pain.
11. Both NDEs and mystical experiences are highly diverse. This is because people's spiritual and psychological backgrounds, as well as their actions, differ. Each person partakes from their own existential table, and since these tables differ, so do their experiences.
12. When the soul separates from the body, does the person attain complete wisdom and omniscience? Certainly not. Absolute knowledge belongs to God alone. Furthermore, mystics and NDE observers have relayed information after their experiences that contains many errors. The reported feeling of knowing everything in that state is an incomplete account of their

emotions—it is not true knowledge but a feeling of knowledge, stemming from a state of great peace and security where they knew nothing could harm them.

13. Another question: when a person has an NDE or a mystic has a visionary experience, are all dimensions of existence revealed to them? The answer is also no. In that state, the mystic or experiencer sees only a corner of truth from a specific angle—illuminated only by the inner lamp they carry, which lights up one dimension of existence for their awareness.
14. In the other realm, will everyone be in the same place? Since the body and its attachments have dissolved, and worldly relations no longer exist, spiritual affinities and similarities will prevail. The soul will gravitate towards places and beings with whom it shares a connection.
15. A human appears in a specific place and limited time within the material world but has free will, various needs, attachments, and desires. Therefore, a person can either grow or decline in this world. The basis for growth here is a choice: you can make yourself and your ego the goal, or you can base your life on others, relinquish your own claims, and thus grow through benevolence and love for others. However, because humans are equipped with a body, bodily pleasures, and emotional needs, choosing is very difficult. Growth or decline in this world can be very rapid. In the other realm, however, where the body and its attachments and pleasures are absent, growth occurs very slowly and rarely.
16. Humans are created in a way that they can pursue their own interests and pleasures, expanding themselves more and more. On the other hand, they can also renounce themselves, their interests, and their pleasures, sacrificing themselves for the greater “We” and for existence itself. Perhaps we have come here to experience being part of a greater whole and to practice the act of self-transcendence.

2

A Transcendental Claim Regarding Mystics

Habib ollah Noorani,
Philosophy Graduate

The highest and most magnificent phenomenon flowing through existence and nature is order. Order is an unchanging and permanent aspect of nature. Stars and planets move with a precise arrangement and order, and it is through this that existence and nature are sustained. It is from this very flow of specific order and arrangement that science becomes possible.

Regarding mystics, many transcendental claims have been made—claims that are especially appealing and enticing to the Persian mind. These claims fall into two domains: the power of mystics and their knowledge or awareness. We shall examine both and raise some questions.

1. The Awareness of Mystics

There is often great exaggeration regarding the wisdom of mystics—that their awareness is vast and supernatural. Several questions arise:

- Did the mystics who attained the garden of the divine realm know the laws of physics, medicine, or astronomy?
  No. If the answer were yes, there would be no need for physicists, doctors, or astronomers to strive.
- Did mystics who reached certain spiritual degrees possess complete mastery over social sciences, political science, philosophy, and other cultural matters?
  Here, too, the answer is certainly no. Social sciences, political science, and philosophy have many unresolved questions, and the flow of knowledge continues. Moreover, mystics have written many books on social, political, and philosophical topics that are filled with countless errors.

Thus, the awareness of mystics cannot be considered supernatural. It seems the order of the world applies in this realm as well. A scientist who strives in the field of physics will understand and discover a fragment of truth—a truth that will not simply fall into the mystic's grasp, because his efforts lie in a different domain.

Are the words of mystics about philosophy certain? The answer is clear: philosophy is filled with unanswered questions. In other words, philosophy is the act of philosophizing—a process that continues as long as humanity exists. People, together, gradually approach truth drop by drop; no one has access to absolute truth. Philosophy begins with doubt and proceeds through reasoning.

Therefore, the idea that the awareness of mystics is extraordinarily high and encompasses most matters cannot be taken seriously.

2. The Power of Mystics

There has been much exaggeration regarding the power of mystics. The order of nature always prevails, and this holds true for all beings. A knife cuts—whether it is the neck of a human or an animal. Indeed, as mentioned, this is the greatest and most magnificent principle in nature and existence: law and order are always

in effect. Imagine if a knife cut sometimes but not other times, or if the sun rose sometimes but not always—life would face chaos.

Some claims about the power of mystics are even laughable—for example, that a certain mystic in the fifth century could fly. We can certainly say that no one in history has ever seen a human fly, or a tree uproot itself and fly, or another creature take flight. No one has seen a camel fly. (Though thanks to science and the discovery of nature's order, flying in an airplane has become natural.)

It is also claimed that a mystic healed a sick person. How many mystics are there in the world, and how many patients have they healed? Are these reports even accurate? Even if we assume they are true, what benefit has accrued to humanity? Today, thanks to medical science, many patients recover in every city. If we had left healing to mystics, the world's population would now be in catastrophe. Mystics were never able to overcome illness and death themselves—so we cannot attribute to them a power beyond nature.

The claim of ṭayy al-arḍ (teleportation) by mystics is also strange and futile. God gave humans feet so they can walk, and today airplanes transport millions. Has anyone ever seen someone fly—for example, from Qom to Kashan? Has this ever brought any benefit to humanity? No one has seen a tree fly or an elephant float in the air. These notions arise from human desires and fantasies. The way to achieve our wishes is through discovering the laws of nature and striving in that direction.

The Persian mind has a great fondness for the miraculous, and many tales are told in this regard. Mystics often speak of a great garden where they have dwelt, which brought them ecstasy and delight. But such a matter is fruitless and without benefit. Consider: out of billions of people, only a hundred have spoken of such a garden, and only a few have talked about it for a short time. What gain does that bring to ordinary people like me? What is the path to reaching that garden? How can your words be verified?

Another question about mysticism is: on which inner dimension of the human being does mysticism rest? Philosophy relies on reason, and its method is argument. Poetry relies on imagination. But concerning mysticism, the question remains: on which inner dimension is it based, and what changes does it bring about in that dimension?

What is said about the transcendental matters of mystics is largely based on human hopes, desires, and a fascination with the supernatural—and nothing more. No one in history has flown in the air, and no one has seen it. No human has been able to overcome death or disease. No mystic has been able to break the flow and law of nature. Mystics, through prayer and meditation, attained deep inner peace

and developed a strong intuitive knowledge—and that is the whole story. No mystic ever possessed supernatural awareness or power.

3

Boundaries: A Breeding Ground for Violence

Habib ollah Noorani,
Philosophy Graduate

Humanity has achieved immense and wondrous feats in various fields such as art, philosophy, science, poetry, and more. Alongside these positive achievements, however, it has unfortunately also inherited a dark legacy that has fueled violence and hatred. One of these grim "achievements" is the creation of various walls and boundaries. Wherever widespread, organized violence has taken shape, a boundary has been defined, and it is through these boundaries that violence finds its justification.

We are familiar with territorial boundaries since ancient times, which have been the primary cause of human conflict throughout history. These physical borders were not enough, however, leading humans to create boundaries of language, creed, ethnicity, and more. How many people have been sent to their graves because of language? It is strange that language, which was created to facilitate meaningful interaction between people, becomes an instrument of violence.

When a boundary is established, violence against those on the other side becomes permissible. When boundary-drawing reaches ethnicity, race becomes a reason for division and violence, with Hitler being a prominent example. The most absurd boundary is based on human skin color, and the history of its violence is well documented.

The process of boundary-making continues into the realm of religion, which was meant for human elevation. Shiites and Sunnis, who are identical and similar in most of their beliefs, differ in a few. Yet, some choose to point exclusively at these differences, ignoring the commonalities. Thus, the categories of "us" and "them" are created, and one can easily imagine the violence that ensues. History

has seen countless bloodsheds born from religious boundaries. Christianity, which emerged from Judaism and should have been kin and brother, became an enemy over a few differing beliefs. Thus, a wall is erected between those who accept certain tenets and those who do not.

Once the boundary exists, violence against those beyond it is sanctioned. Once violence is sanctioned, that Christian no longer considers that the Jewish child cannot even properly articulate beliefs, and deems violence against him permissible. Here, violence knows no limits. Pregnant women, children, the elderly, and the vulnerable all become victims of violence and abuse.

If I see the other as like myself, I am unlikely to commit violence against them. I must first posit a difference between myself and the other, and then magnify that difference to a degree that justifies violence. Politicians seeking war first create a boundary or a wall, and amplify the differences so vividly that it incites people on this side of the boundary to attack the other side indiscriminately. Christianity attacked Islamic lands. Theologians and priests erected a massive boundary between Muslims and Christians, even though Muslims and Christians share many beliefs. They set these commonalities aside and insisted on the differences. They declared that Muslims do not accept some of our beliefs and emphasized this so intensely that it became permissible to spill their blood—even children who did not understand the meaning of beliefs or doctrines became victims of these atrocities.

Sometimes, new boundaries form even within an existing one. Sunni and Shiite Muslims further divide into sub-sects. Interestingly, theologians here have a harder task, because the commonalities are many. They must insist on specific words to sharpen the swords and spill the blood of the other. If we considered others as like ourselves, as all being human, it would be unlikely that we would raise a hand to kill another. Wherever talk of difference and boundaries arises, there is someone who intends to create violence.

If one looks at Earth from above, we are all placed on one planet. Earth is home to all of us. If humans seek peace, happiness, and a comfortable life, this can only be achieved if it is universal. Look at the planet from above: if there is war in one place, sooner or later that war will grip others. If only humanity emphasized humanity above all else, and respected humans simply for being human. If only the differences between people were based on ethics and law, and not on artificial walls and boundaries.

In this context, some theologians and scholars make it their work to define boundaries and walls. A Christian theologian wants to precisely define the boundaries of Christianity, becoming sensitive to specific words in order to exclude others and sow the seeds of enmity. Cultural and religious boundaries are

highly sensitive, and it is the duty of scholars to emphasize commonalities and not incite people against one another.

This planet is for everyone. We are all human, and all strangers on this planet. Humans only have each other. Our happiness, well-being, and peace are intertwined. If conflict erupts in one place, sooner or later it will reach elsewhere, because we are all guests on one planet. Imagine children growing up in a family where they witness violence. When such a child grows up, kindness will not emanate from them, because the family did not plant the seed of kindness in them. They enter society and create violence.

We sometimes mistakenly think that violence elsewhere has nothing to do with us, that it is far away. This is not so. Earth is a small planet. That violence will, sooner or later, grip me or my generation. Imagine a group subjected to violence and humiliation—such violence and humiliation will spread to other places.